

The Hill, November 20, 2007

House members from both parties are calling on the Bush administration to delay a \$20 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia and to impose tougher restrictions on how the Middle Eastern country could use the weaponry.

Last week, the Bush administration informally notified Congress of its intention to sell high-technology armaments, including satellite-guided munitions and naval vessels, to Saudi Arabia, which is a key ally in the region. Lawmakers have protested the sale since news first leaked of negotiations in late July.

“The idea that we are going to reward the Saudis with precision weaponry is a stunningly bad idea, and clearly deserves the full review of Congress,” said Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) in a press release.

In a letter sent on Friday to President Bush, Weiner and 113 other House members called for a delay in the formal notification of Congress of the sale because of “difficulties of the schedule in December.”

With last week’s informal notification, the administration has 20 days — roughly until Dec. 4 — to formally notify Congress of the arms deal under the terms of the Arms Export Control Act. Once notified, Capitol Hill has 30 days to pass a joint resolution of disapproval.

The lawmakers contend Congress has too much on its plate in the annual end-of-year legislative crush to adequately review the arms deal with Saudi Arabia. Most appropriations bills remain outstanding, and Congress is weighing major farm and energy legislation.

The letter requests that Bush delay formally notifying Congress until after Jan. 15, 2008, in order to allow lawmakers enough time to consider the deal.

In a separate letter sent Thursday, another bipartisan group of House members called for stricter guidelines on how Saudi Arabia could use the U.S.-sold weapons. Reps. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and Chris Carney (D-Pa.) and 186 other lawmakers expressed “serious concerns” over selling Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) technology — highly accurate precision arms — to the Saudis.

“If it falls into the wrong hands, JDAM technology could significantly harm U.S. forces in the region and undercut Israel’s qualitative military edge,” the letter states.

The lawmakers asked Bush to provide assurances that the technology would not be used against American troops or U.S. allies. They also called on the administration to regularly report to Congress on the status of the weapons transfer and to conduct “intense consultations with our ally Israel” on the terms of the deal.

“Without such assurances, we will oppose the sale,” the letter states.